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ABSTRACT

The Community College of Vermont holds the position that the highest purpose of education is to foster self-reliance, in both the community and the individual. This college awards the associate degree upon the completion of individual, student-written, competence-based degree contracts. Areas of competence which are evaluated include self awareness, communication skills, cultural awareness, community awareness, community relations, interpersonal relationships, creativity, manual skills and physical fitness, environmental awareness, reasoning and problem solving competence, and overall knowledge. The processes and materials developed to (1) help students and local review committees agree on standards that are unique to student goals, (2) accurately reflect community expectations, and (3) conform to the institution's educational principles are described. The steps involved in developing the degree sequence are also outlined. (Author/MV)

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STANDARD SETTING BY STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY— HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

CAEL Institutional Report
Community College of Vermont

Cooperative Assessment of
Experiential Learning

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CAEL Institutional Report
Community College of Vermont

Standard Setting by Students and Community—How Much Is Enough?

Laurent A. Daloz
Clotilde Pitkin

CAEL Institutional Reports are prepared at member institutions in cooperation with the CAEL project, and are based upon special projects commissioned by the CAEL Steering Committee. While Institutional Reports reflect the general orientation and types of work priorities determined by the Steering Committee, they are reports of the individual institutions and may reflect practices different from those suggested elsewhere by CAEL.

Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning

September 1976

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PREFACE

About the CAEL Operational Models Project

This report is one of a series of institutional reports produced under the auspices of the CAEL Operational Models Project. A few words of background may be useful in helping readers to understand the purpose of the work and the context in which it was undertaken.

CAEL's overall mission is to improve the assessment of experiential learning, but considering how assessment techniques and materials are used in institutions, it is clear that there are many problems of implementation. Assessment does not exist as an isolated process but is embedded in a context of existing academic procedures, policies, and people. The CAEL Steering Committee recognized that if experiential learning is to become an effective part of the curriculum, it is critical to develop sound procedures for integrating the assessment process into the traditional academic structure.

The Operational Models Project was conceived in response to that need. It was supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education in July 1975. The basic plan was to select 12 institutions facing rather different implementation problems and to provide a cooperative context for each to devote special attention to its particular concern. Some have focused on the problem of defining standards--an issue that lies at the heart of most educational questions that arise with respect to a new program. Other institutions have focused upon the problem of financing learning and assessment programs--an issue that lies at the heart of most administrative questions that arise with respect to a new program.

Each institutional team has worked toward clarification and documentation of desirable policies and working procedures for incorporating the assessment of experiential learning into the fabric of its own institution; i.e., an improved operational model. This report is one of the products. In order to enhance the dissemination and utilization of this work, each institution producing an operational model has held or will hold a local "dissemination workshop" for interested institutions in its immediate area. In addition, the institutions held national workshops at the fall 1976 CAEL Assembly meeting.

Even though the 12 institutions participating in this project were selected partly because they faced different implementation problems, there is necessarily a good deal of commonality of interest and overlap in the issues of greatest concern. As a consequence, it sometimes happens that the same issue or assessment practice is discussed in several reports from a somewhat different point of view. From the perspective of someone reading the entire series, some points may appear to be repeated unnecessarily, but there is value in noting the manner in which a general approach is adapted in different situations. Furthermore, it was felt more important to have each institutional report stand on its own than to artificially edit out discussion of an essential aspect of an assessment system simply because that aspect is reflected in the work of more than one institution. The authors have, however, tried to focus their attention on the unique aspects of their programs so that this series can have a maximum benefit to other institutions.

The Community College of Vermont Operational Model

The Community College of Vermont is a competence-based non-campus system, using skilled local people to teach over 400 courses a year across more than half of the State. About 10 percent of the 2,500 students have engaged the counseling services of the College to develop "contracts" for the Associate Degree. The educational mission is to produce "self-reliant learners" --people who have learned how to learn.

In concert with counselors, trained community members, and a "Local Review Committee" of community and staff people, students develop individual learning plans which grow into "completed contracts," on the basis of which the degree is awarded. Thus, the community plays a crucial role in the process of establishing degree standards.

The purpose of the project described here is to develop a process and materials *to help students and Local Review Committees agree on standards that are unique to student goals, that accurately reflect community expectations and that conform to CCV's educational principles.* One result of the project is this *report*, now formally accepted as the framework of the College's academic procedures. A second result has been the development of a set of guidelines and materials for the training and orientation of students and committee members alike.

The opening portion of the report provides an overview of the problem, listing basic assumptions and sketching what we have learned thus far. Chapter II walks the reader through the process. The third chapter details the roles played by the College and the Committee. And the final chapter briefly discusses some of the more prominent outcroppings along the journey--problems and issues.

In an epilogue, we point to what we think we have learned from our pilgrimage thus far. In a nutshell, it is that when students and community are given a chance, they can take education into their own hands, they can restore a sense of relevance and self-determination to the learning process--they can, indeed, become more self-reliant.

No single person can rightfully claim the honors for what we have described here. Among chief contributors to the evolving process have been the members of our task force:

Marcia Daker, John Findlay, Susan Fine, Gerry Hammar, Don Hooper, Debbie Houston, Betty Perkins, Mary Wade, and Duane Wells.

We wish also to acknowledge helpful comments on the draft from Barbara Ploof, Larry Diamond, Penny Horowitz, Margery Walker, Ken Sauerman, Fran Patry, Susan Smallwood, and Jackie West.

Our President, Peter Smith, provided invaluable support and direction at a time when we almost forgot what it was all about; he had not.

And finally, we wish to thank all those Vermonters--learners, teachers, helpers, taxpayers, legislators--who, in the most fundamental way, have made it all come true.

TO THE READER

The Community College of Vermont awards the Associate Degree upon completion of a competence-based degree contract developed by each student with the help of college staff and a Local Review Committee. On the committee are a peer student, a teacher, a local practitioner competent in the student's field, and a member of the CCV staff. All live and work in the student's home community.

Ever since we began to work with Local Review Committees to assess the past experience and future learning plans of degree students, we have been confronted with the question: *How much learning is enough for the degree?* It came, therefore, as something of a relief to discover that we were not the only institution grappling with the question. For as the "competence-based" movement gains momentum nationally and as more and more colleges across the country begin to recognize the nonformal learning of millions of adult students, the shortcomings of the time-based "credit" system spawned in traditional classrooms have become increasingly apparent.

As we began to forge our own answers, it gradually dawned on us that, important as it is--for the question speaks to the very heart of a college's "academic standards"--we had to answer first the question: *Who decides, and how?* For by insisting that community review committees rather than a campus-based faculty decide when a student should receive the degree, the College was affirming that the answer to the question "How much is enough?" must lie in the nexus of the student's own goals, the community's expectations, and the college's requirements.

Such a stance can be disconcerting to those who have come to view the meaning of a college degree as being rooted, if not in scripture, at least in reason. Terrible doubts arise: What about those who have always established standards before--the faculty? How can we be sure community people know enough? How does CCV ensure *consistency* of the degree from one student or one committee to another? Where, in the end, is the College's *quality control*?

Our answer, in brief, is that most communities do have within themselves the resources necessary to allow significant learning to occur. Indeed, our "faculty" is entirely part-time and drawn from the community. The task of the College is to provide a framework on which learning can happen. Thus, CCV's consistency and quality control are to be found not in the *content* of learning, but in the *process* through which competence is acquired and assessed. To detail the nature of that process and to discuss some of its strengths and weaknesses is the purpose of this report.

The first chapter takes a look at several of the College's founding principles and briefly sketches our early efforts to build a workable system around those principles. The paper then describes the process itself. And finally, it turns to a discussion of the chief problems and issues which have emerged as we have begun to test our convictions. Although our own responses to those problems are still very much under development, we do hope that the process will be as useful for the reader as it has been for us.

I. OVERVIEW

Since the learning programs of the Community College of Vermont first began to take shape five years ago, several basic educational principles have emerged to guide the development process. As they must be numbered among the assumptions on which this project rests, they are worth noting here.

- The primary purpose of education is to foster self-reliance: the idea that people and communities alike can educate themselves.
- Local communities have sufficient resources to foster significant learning and contribute to the establishment of academic standards.
- Self-reliance is best acquired when the learning needs of communities and individual students form the basis for curriculum development.
- Learning how to learn is equally as important as the acquisition of content.
- Clear identification of learning outcomes is a more valid basis for educational evaluation than measurement of time spent learning.

Upon these principles, CCV developed a system in which each student wrote, with the help of a counselor, a competence-based "study plan" that gradually grew into a completed degree contract through a series of meetings with a Local Review Committee. When, upon exhaustive review of documentation presented by the student, the committee was satisfied that the contract was complete, award of the degree was recommended. Assessment of prior learning was thus a continuous process, and future learning plans grew out of assessment and discussion of past accomplishments. Because the vast majority of the College's students are adult learners with considerable experience behind them, a major part of the degree was often rooted in prior learning.

To provide a framework for assessment and degree planning, the College called together special advisory groups of community practitioners and experts to develop three "programs" --sets of broad competence statements appropriate to the Human Services, Administrative Services, and General Studies. In general, the results of this work have been remarkably fruitful. One hundred seventy graduates have emerged from the process and branched out into a wide variety of new directions, from mental health technician, to business manager, to further work in Bachelor's and Master's degree programs.

But students have not been the only learners. We, too have learned amply from the experience. Here are some of our discoveries.

- In assessing prior learning, it is essential to separate learning from experience.

  > The question is not, How do we give credit for this experience? but rather, How do we help the student identify what was learned from the experience? This is particularly important when the process of prior learning assessment is seen in a broader light than simply as a way to give advanced standing.

- When emphasis is placed on self-assessment and the development of student-written statements of competence, the process can be a richly rewarding educational experience in itself.

  We discovered that as students began to identify what they had learned from their experience, they were able to build a new image of themselves--to see themselves as learning continually from experience. Awareness of learning allowed them to make the leap toward a future for which they felt they could take some responsibility.

- Development of a contract or "portfolio" is enhanced by working in groups with other students.

  Although we began working with groups as an efficiency move, we quickly learned that many students can help each other more than we ourselves could help them. We now work almost exclusively in groups called "contracting workshops" that meet for 15 weeks to prepare for a first Local Review Committee meeting. This has also allowed us to engage peer counselors and other community people more fully in the process.

- The surrounding community is rich in information helpful to students.

  Because most of the CCV staff are *process people*, skilled in helping others learn, but not, themselves, bound to a particular subject, it was imperative that students who needed specific information on competence necessary for particular fields and careers should seek it from models in the community. Thus, during the group contracting workshops students are encouraged to seek out knowledgeable people from whom to learn what they will need to know. In effect, an important part of the *standard-setting* process begins right here.

These discoveries and the procedures through which they have been put to use are detailed elsewhere.[1] Suffice it to say that the early CCV years saw most of our energy going into the development of the contract-building and self-assessment process.

With the current CAEL "Operational Model," it was time to turn to the workings of the Local Review Committees, themselves. Was it really true that people in local communities could reasonably participate with students to establish standards? What were the problems with the system? And why was it that, no matter how hard we tried, students and committee members alike were still turning to us in the heat of the meeting and asking: How much is enough?

In the Fall of 1975, a task force of CCV staff members, representing each major office of our campus-free system, came together to address those questions. The basic approach was a simple problem-solving one. We gleaned information from other staff, students, committee members, and our own experience and identified a long list of the difficulties faced by students and committee members during the review process.

After considerable discussion and analysis, we boiled them all down into these questions:

1. How can we put the student in charge?

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[1] See "*Student Self-Assessment of Non-Sponsored Learning*," Community College of Vermont CAEL Special Project, June, 1975.

2. How can meetings be more effective?
3. How can we ensure clear expectations between student and committee?
4. How can we resolve the conflict between helping and evaluating?
5. How can we improve the caliber of committee members?

We then agreed that, however we answer these questions, the following criteria should be satisfied:

a. The student stays, and feels, in charge.
b. The meetings make the best possible use of time.
c. All parties are clear, throughout, about what each expects from the other.
d. The confusion of "helping" and "evaluating" will be as little as possible.
e. Members will be the best available.

This done, the group went to work. The next chapter details the process that has emerged. In part, it represents procedures already in operation at the College--the basic structure of the student-written contract, the collection of evidence in a portfolio, the meetings with the Local Review Committee--and in part, it represents a roadmap of territory still to be traveled.

II. THE REVIEW PROCESS

This chapter leads the reader through the review process in detail. We begin with a description of the purpose of the project, we offer a definition of *standards*, and we then go through the whole process once quickly first from the point of view of the student and then of the committee. That done, we'll go through the steps more slowly, dwelling in detail on the crucial stages.

Given the educational assumptions and values of the College, given the strengths and weaknesses of the system as it had emerged thus far, and given the criteria for a successful design, the challenge to the task force was *"to develop a process and materials which will help students and Local Review Committees to agree on Associate Degree standards that are unique to student goals, that accurately reflect community expectations, and that conform to CCV's educational principles."*

To accomplish this purpose, it was necessary, first, to understand what we meant by *standards*. We arrived at this definition:

> A standard is a measurement along a certain criterion. Thus, if you were to divide all people in the world into two piles, you would need, first, to decide what criterion to use. You could then decide on a standard of measurement. If, for instance, you chose "height" as a criterion, you might establish a standard of "56 inches." Applying a tape measure, you could then sort everyone into your piles. Should you choose "weight," you might select 150 pounds as a standard, weigh everyone, and make your decisions.

With this distinction, it was then possible to establish that the criteria according to which Local Review Committees make their decisions are the "Ten Areas of Competence"[2] recognized by the College as fundamental to any degree program. The *standards* are the specific statements of competence agreed upon by the student and the committee in light of student goals and committee expectations.

ONCE OVER LIGHTLY...

As the diagram on page 6 indicates, the student and the committee follow independent paths at first. They meet together at least twice--once to agree on where they're going, and later to determine whether or not they have arrived. In a few cases where students have met all requirements, a single meeting may be sufficient. However, there may be any number of optional meetings, depending on the needs and readiness of the student. Upon approval of the Local Review Committee, the student's completed contract is sent to the CCV Review Board, a single board made up of College staff and community members which meets twice a year to provide final approval and to rule on appeals if necessary.

The Student

Through orientation meetings and materials provided by the College, students are advised of the choices available for degree study. When a student decides to enter the process, a meeting

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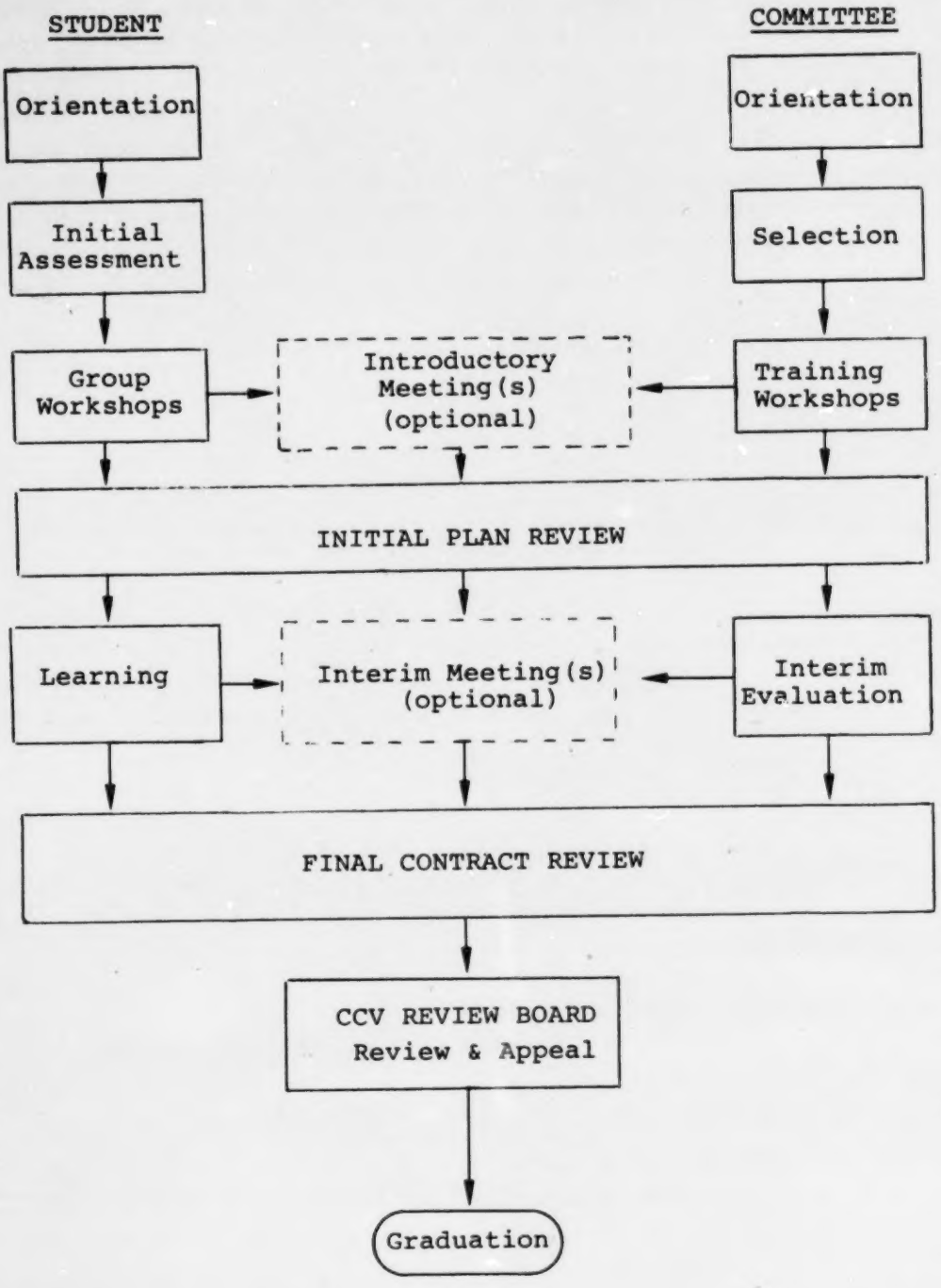
[2] See Appendix

Figure 1. The Contract Development and Review Process



is arranged with a counselor to discuss the decision in more detail and to undertake an initial assessment procedure. If the student decides to continue, he or she will most likely join a contracting workshop, led by a college staff or community member. This group generally meets for a term exploring goals, identifying prior learning, planning future learning, and preparing the study plan for presentation to the committee. During this time, the student will very likely meet with a number of community practitioners to identify skills and knowledge needed in his or her chosen field. In certain cases, the student may elect to attend an "introductory meeting" of the committee. The purpose is primarily to let the student and the committee members get to know one another.

When the student feels ready, the plan is taken to the committee for review and discussion. This initial meeting results in a letter of agreement from the committee to the student detailing what remains to be done.

After the initial meeting, the student begins working on the plan negotiated with the committee. This may take anywhere from a few weeks to several years. During this period, the student may choose to meet again with the committee as appropriate.

At some point, when the student believes that the agreed-upon standards have been met, he or she returns to the committee. At this point, the committee reviews all remaining documentation and determines if the terms have been met. If all conditions have been met, the committee recommends the student to the CCV Review Board for the degree.

The Committee

The committee member generally first hears of the chance to serve when contacted by the College, often at the request of a student. In many cases, also, the opportunity is made available through routine communication with community teachers.

A general orientation is held in which the overall process and rationale are explained. Those wishing to pursue the matter further express their interest to the college. At a later time, a more detailed orientation session is held in which materials are made available and discussed. On the basis of their continued interest and an assessment by staff against selection criteria, a final list of potential committee members is drawn up and held for use as needed.

Upon notification of a meeting time, members receive the materials from the student--generally a letter of explanation and the partially completed study plan.

At the initial meeting, the student presents a study plan, asserting his or her present competence in areas covered by the plan and outlining what he or she wishes to learn in the future. At the conclusion of the meeting, a detailed letter is drawn up outlining the committee's reactions and recommendations.

Each subsequent meeting, except the last, is conducted in essentially the same manner, with a letter of expectations for the next meeting always emerging.

At least twice a year feedback from students and members is solicited and discussed. Ideas for improvement are submitted to the College as a whole.

On the basis of the penultimate meeting's recommendations, the final meeting is held to

determine whether the conditions of the letter have been met. If so, the awarding of the degree is recommended.

IN MORE DETAIL...

Let's take a closer look now at the process. Consider that three major functions must occur: preparing, meeting, and evaluating the whole process.

Preparing

Both student and committee need considerable preparation in order to ensure that the meetings will be as fruitful as possible. This is not an activity that one can participate in effectively right off the street. On the other hand, it should not be so obscure that it requires months of training merely to be understood. As CCV's committee members serve voluntarily, it is essential that things be kept as simple as possible.

In order for a productive standard-setting process to take place, it is essential that the student make available to his or her committee the following information:

- a general overview of who the student is, where he or she comes from, what he or she wants to do in life.
- a clear idea of why the student wants the degree and what he or she plans to do with it when it is received.
- clear descriptions of the student's present competence, how it was acquired, and how each area of competence will be demonstrated.
- where possible, clear statements of what the student wants to learn in order to accomplish his or her goal and how the student plans to demonstrate that these goals have been reached.
- some idea of which areas the student thinks are most important, which need more work, and which the student feels he or she "has had enough of."

With the exception of the last, this information is usually provided in the form of a "study plan"--an embryonic contract, containing all the parts (see page 13) but in incomplete form. This is mailed to the committee about a week in advance, along with a covering letter from the student explaining his or her own priorities and what he or she wants from the committee.

Needless to say, all this information requires considerable preparation on the student's part. In most cases, this happens in the "contracting workshop" alluded to earlier. These workshops generally span a full term and employ a wide variety of goal clarification and self-assessment techniques and exercises. They may be taught by a trained community member or a staff counselor.[3] In any event, each student is assigned a regular counselor who provides ongoing support and encouragement all along the way. Although not a member of the committee, the counselor may elect to accompany the student to the meetings if it seems appropriate.

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[3]See *"Student Self-Assessment of Non-Sponsored Learning,"* Community College of Vermont CAEL Special Project, June, 1975.

Statement listing student goal with "area"

One of the "Ten Areas of Competence"

Communication

Communication is at the heart of the counseling process. It is important to recognize how both verbal and nonverbal communication affect it. Interviewing skills are also essential, and, especially to continue my education, I will have to be able to write well:

PAST LEARNING

COMPETENCE STATEMENTS	EXPERIENCE	EVIDENCE
I. I am aware that language, both verbal and non-verbal, is an encounter.	1. Lay ministry work	A. Letter from The Reverend Nixon
a. I know that I communicate to most people a feeling of being present.		
b. I believe that language is a test of communion: it reveals what each person carries in himself.		
c. I know that words are colored by cultural, economic, social, and political differences.	7. "Language As Politics"--UVM Extension Course	F. Course evaluation from Pelson Snickerhaus UVM Transcript
d. I realize the importance of silence as a shared bond between people.		
II. I can carry out a planned interview effectively:	8. Interviewing Workshop OEA 3-day training	M. Evaluation statement from Workshop Leader
a. I can plan an interview to get certain information.		
b. I can ask nonthreatening questions.		
c. I can record information unobtrusively and accurately.		
III. I am able to write letters and reports competently.	12. "Write On!"--CCV Course	Q. Course evaluation from Deirdre O'Cohen
a. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation are accurate.		

Documents in the portfolio reviewed by Committee

Student-written statements

Setting where learning occurred

In addition to helping students develop the actual documents, the workshops provide important peer support and encouragement for what can be a quite unsettling prospect. Students often see the initial meeting as a time when "my whole life is up for grabs." For this reason, an "introductory meeting" may be helpful when students are particularly uneasy.

For the committee, orientation and selection are of particular importance. Orientation occurs at two levels. A broad overview is needed to allow prospective committee members to decide whether they wish to commit themselves further. At this point they are able to raise questions about the procedures and clarify their own uncertainties. The second-level orientation goes into greater detail and, in some cases, is carried out in formal training sessions. At this point, members are given materials to help them recognize good statements of competence, identify a variety of evaluation methods, and work effectively with students. Final selection of committee members is made after this second-level orientation and is based on the criteria shown on page 11.

Meetings

The meetings are where it all comes together. Except in extremely rare cases, there are at least two meetings, generally more.

The Initial Meeting. The purpose of the first meeting is to help the student determine more clearly where he or she is, where he or she has to go, how to get there, and how to demonstrate that he or she has arrived. In short, it is to confirm a plan.

Although the student does not chair the meeting, it is important that every effort be made to ensure that the student feels on a par with committee members. Upon self-introductions and explanations of their own competence and experience by committee members, the student usually leads off, explaining why he or she is there and elaborating on the points made in the covering letter. It is of particular importance at this point for all parties to reach clear understanding of the student's goal--why he or she wants the degree--for this will form the basis of the discussion of "how much is enough" which follows. "Enough" communication competence, for a budding counselor, for instance, may be quite different from "enough" for a future office manager. Distinction must also be made when two people in the same field have different future plans--one going immediately into practice, the other continuing formal education. Indeed, the competence required may be of a different type entirely.[4]

When the student goal is clear to all and after points raised in the narrative have been discussed, the committee generally begins examining the study plan, area by area. The sample "program outline sheet" on page 9 is an example of one part of one area.

On the basis of this particular student's goal statement, the committee knows that the student wishes to become a paraprofessional counselor perhaps with a drug or alcohol rehabilitation agency. The student has written a brief "linking statement" at the top of the sheet on the "Communication" area describing why this area is important to the study plan. The student has also explained that, while she feels she has already acquired certain skills, she would like help

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[4]For discussion of this, see page 21.

Criteria for Members of the Local Review Committee

All members will demonstrate the following:

- -understanding and acceptance of CCV's general educational stance.
- -a reasonable grasp of the procedures and regulations of the College vis à vis the contract/review process.
- -ability to recognize a good statement of competence and to help a student improve a bad one.
- -knowledge of local learning and evaluation resources available to the student.
- -ability to play helpful part in a group setting.

In addition, for each role:

Chairperson

- -a thorough knowledge and sharing of CCV's educational stance.
- -a detailed knowledge of CCV's procedures and degree regulations.
- -the ability to conduct an effective group meeting.

Peer Student

- -the ability to empathize with and provide helpful support to the student.
- -personal experience with the degree process.
- -the ability to recognize a clear competence statement.

Teacher

- -the ability to comment effectively on the educational value of the student's work and plans.
- -desirable, but not mandatory, experience in teaching a CCV course.

Practitioner

- -considerable knowledge of and experience in the student's field.

in identifying any "holes" that she should work on. This particular sheet is a partial description of the student's past learning.

Note that the competence statements specifically state what the student knows and believes about nonverbal communication. These statements are keyed to a list of learning experiences describing where the knowledge was acquired, and to the evidence (contained in a portfolio which may or may not have been brought to the initial meeting) which will confirm the competence statements.

As discussion proceeds, the committee and student agree whether the competence in each area is appropriate.

By the end of the meeting, the committee should have answers to these questions:

- Is the goal an appropriate and realistic reflection of what the student wants to do?
- Are the student's statements of past and future learning in each of the ten areas appropriate to the goal?
- For those areas in which further work remains, is it clear what the student will learn, how the work will be done, and how competence will be demonstrated?
- When should the student return for another meeting, and what is expected at that point?

All this is discussed with the student and then written in a letter of agreement.

Optional Meetings. Optional meetings may be held at the request of the student, the committee, or both, with or without the student.

The committee might choose to meet together before seeing the student personally in order to clarify certain points about the plan and to prepare a uniform presentation. Or they might wish to meet alone later in order to reach final agreement about whether or not to recommend the student for the degree. In addition, if the student wishes to make significant changes in the plan, a meeting would be required. Finally, both student and committee might agree in their initial letter to meet at a specified time for a *progress check*. Although none of these is mandatory, it has been our experience that such meetings can be quite helpful. Flexibility is encouraged.

"Final" Meeting. We have placed the word "*final*" in quotation marks because the term poses particular problems. No one actually knows that a meeting is final until it is over and determination has been made that the contract has been completed. Labeling a meeting "final" in advance tends to raise expectations on the part of the student and may leave committee members feeling their hands are tied.

Nonetheless, at some point the criteria on page 13 are reviewed in light of the student's contract and the initial letter. Three decisions are possible.

1. Return for further work

   Where the committee agrees that the terms of the letter are not met or that the contract clearly does not meet College criteria, the specifics are set down in a letter to the student, and the student must make the changes befor returning for another review meeting.

Criteria for Determining Acceptability of a Completed Contract

A. The narrative is comprehensive, well-written, and provides the reader with a full picture of who the student is, where he or she has been, and where he or she is going.

B. The goal statement is clear and sufficiently detailed to allow the student and committee to use it as the basis for determining standards. It should clearly explain why the student wants the degree, what he or she intends to do with it, and what external requirements must be met.

C. Student competence statements

-focus on reasonably generalizable skills and knowledge rather than on experiences.
-describe competence that can be observed and evaluated.
-are clear, concise, and interesting to read.
-relate in some recognizable way to the overall goal.

D. All ten CCV Competence Areas are addressed.

E. Learning experiences

-are linked to statements of competence so the committee can tell where the learning occurred.
-are sufficiently well described that the committee can understand what occurred.
-are listed separately and dated so the committee can tell when they occurred.

F. Evidence of learning

-is valid--it clearly confirms the learning asserted.
-is comprehensive--it represents a full and consistent picture from a variety of sources.
-is linked to competence statements, separately indexed, and organized in a portfolio so that the committee can refer to it easily.

2. Acceptable with conditions

   Where relatively minor details remain, such as a missing document or unsigned evaluation, the committee may sign the contract, delegating responsibility for final clearance to the chairperson who will "sign off" on receiving the final pieces.

3. Recommend for degree

   Where all conditions are satisfied, the committee signs the contract and forwards it to the Site Director, who sends it to the CCV Review Board Chairperson.

Should the student differ significantly with the committee's recommendations, appeal is possible in a two-step process: (1) to the Site Director, (2) to the CCV Review Board.

Evaluating

In order to keep the whole process responsive and flexible, a broad evaluation mechanism is crucial. This is the responsibility of the Chairperson of the CCV Review Board. Data will be collected twice a year from students, committee members, and staff. This information will be presented in the form of a report to the CCV Review Board, who will review it and consider appropriate action.

III. ROLES

This chapter looks more closely at two of the three major roles in the process--that of the College and that of the Committee. As the student's part is dealt with in detail previously, it will not concern us here.

THE ROLE OF THE COLLEGE

As the participant ultimately responsible for the integrity of the process, the College must see that its expectations are clearly communicated and rigorously enforced. This is accomplished by playing several parts.

First, the College communicates its expectations to the student and committee This is done in the form of the official *Guidelines*, currently being refined as a part of this project. These include criteria for selection of committee members, criteria for evaluation of contracts, descriptions of procedures, and a variety of sample materials for use in orientation of members and students.

Second, upon recommendation from students, staff, and others, the College retains final responsibility for appointment of committee members.

Third, in the person of the peer student and Local Review Committee Chairperson, the College ensures that the committee remains fully apprised of how the *Guidelines* are to be applied and interpreted during the review process.

Fourth, by requiring final review at the all-college level by the CCV Review Board, the College ensures that the *Guidelines* have been consistently applied in all parts of the state.

Fifth, by setting the criteria in the form of its "Ten Areas of Competence," the College is able to maintain educationally sound breadth and depth in each student's program without dictating the specific content of study.

And finally, through the intensive counseling process, students are informed of the College's expectations over the entire period of their program development. Though informal, this contact with counseling staff throughout the long process of degree development is probably the most important way in which students are exposed to CCV's educational philosophy.

THE ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE

To the extent that is is true that standards are set "in the nexus of the students' own goals, the community's expectations, and the college's requirements," the Local Review Committee must represent "the community's expectations." While no one could pretend that any committee of four could fully represent a community, no matter how defined, the College contends that since the members of the committee almost invariably do live in the same geographic community, and since the practitioner, and more often than not the teacher, is familiar with the expectations of the professional community into which the student is seeking entry, the committee does represent a reasonable sample. Moreover, although the peer student may not be familiar with a

fellow student's field, he is inevitably concerned that the quality of the CCV degree to which he, too, aspires, should be the highest possible. Finally, it has been our experience that the expectations and norms present in most of our rural communities serve to increase, rather than decrease, the rigor of a committee's expectations.

Although the tasks of the committee vary according to the stage of the student's progress (see Chapter II), they are as follows:

- to contribute to the *standard setting process* by determining the appropriateness of the student's competence in relation to his or her goal.
- to provide information about learning and evaluation resources.
- to help the student make the contract a more accurate reflection of his or her competence.
- to ensure that the contract meets CCV specifications.
- to review the terms agreed upon between the student and the committee.
- to review evidence provided by the student for reliability and validity.
- to provide primary evidence in cases where secondary evidence is inappropriate.

Although there is usually considerable overlap in the parts played by committee members, each brings a particular kind of expertise and has a particular part to play. The specific roles of the members are listed below.

Chairperson

- Is responsible for the overall management and smooth functioning of the review process.
- Facilitates meetings, keeping focus on the student's goals, ensuring clear communication and equal participation among participants, striving for helpful objectivity, and generally keeping the tone of the meeting positive.
- Explains and clarifies college expectations and procedures.
- Makes sure that notes are taken and a final summary of the meeting is presented clearly for discussion with the student.
- Sees that a summary letter of agreement is drafted and sent to the student.
- Ensures that the roles and responsibilities of each member are held in balance.

Peer Student

- Provides a student perspective to other committee members, helping them to understand how the presenting student sees things.
- Helps to explain College procedures and technicalities.
- Supports the student by sharing own experiences and solutions to problems that may arise.
- Gains valuable experience for own contract development.

- When appropriate, helps committee recognize a good statement of competence.

Practitioner

- Brings practical perspective and can suggest "hands on" learning experiences.
- Provides specific information about the requirements of the professional world into which the student seeks entry.

Teacher

- Brings an educational perspective to the student's plan.
- Provides suggestions and ideas for how the student might go about designing relevant learning experiences.
- Suggests ways to demonstrate competence.

Although these descriptions appear discrete, most members, in fact, find themselves playing a variety of parts, and all contribute to the overall functions of the committee.

IV. PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

It often turns out that unresolvable dilemmas are answers to bad questions. As we have often been confronted with such dilemmas, we have tried, in developing the model outlined in this paper, to restrict our attention to useful questions. Nonetheless, certain apparent dilemmas have continued to raise their dogged little heads as we went along. It may be instructive to take a look at some of them now.

Does the Local Review Committee Serve as a Guide or as a Judge?

Much blood has been shed over the apparent conflict between a "guidance" role and an "evaluative" one. How can the same group both counsel and evaluate? The dilemma will persist as long as the assumption is maintained that the relationship between student and committee is fundamentally unequal. For both horns assume that the student is passive--to be "guided" or "judged"--with no direction of his or her own. By placing the student at the center of the process, however, by making a goal-referenced, student-written contract the basis of planning and evaluation, and by attempting in every way possible to maintain a setting in which negotiation can occur in an "adult-adult" way, the dilemma melts away. Both parties fill both functions at different times. The problem then becomes: How do we ensure student equality in the negotiating process?--a much more useful question.

Although it remains to be seen how well it will work, several of the procedures outlined in this report are designed to move us in the direction of equality in the process. Among them, perhaps most important is the careful premeeting preparation of the student through goal clarification and competence identification. The student who enters a committee knowing clearly where he or she stands and where he or she wants to go is more likely to feel equal than one who is simply asking to be told what to do. As this begins to take place, however, still another problem appears to form: If students and committees set their own standards, is there any college-wide consistency? How do we know that a graduate in the depths of Bellows Falls is receiving a degree equivalent to one in the hills of Ripton?

How Does the College Ensure That a Degree Granted by One Committee Is Consistent with One Granted by Another?

This question is asked in a number of ways: How does someone fail at CCV? Don't you have *some* minimum standards? What if a student's goal isn't "high" enough? We haven't answered these questions entirely satisfactorily. How can you espouse both uniqueness and equitability? Currently, however, our response is that the notion of "equitability" becomes irrelevant when the degree criteria are explicit. Simply put, "Don't look at the diploma. Look at what the graduate knows and can do." In effect, we are placing the completed contract as an accurate description of student competence above the diploma--a symbol of presumed comparability. The problem, we argue, lies with society's interpretation of the meaning of a degree, not with CCV's awarding of it. If one accepts this position, there is no longer a question of comparability because there is nothing to compare. But we do hedge. A brief review of the previous chapter will suggest the ways in which the College does maintain a form of *quality control.*

Chiefly, it is through monitoring of the *process* through which the degree is granted. In a sense, there's nothing at all new about that, for that is just what any college administration does. What is new, however, is the locus of that control, residing as it does in competent members of the community. This leads us to the third problem area.

How Can the Degree Reflect Both the College and the Community?

Again, the question assumes that there is a difference. It is our intent that whatever difference may currently manifest itself should be gradually erased, for we contend that in the final analysis education is the community's business. How, then, do we define *community*? It appears that, like Humpty-Dumpty, we make the word mean whatever we wish it to. At times it refers to a geographic entity--a "small town" or a "local region." At times it seems to mean a professional community--the "business world" or "psychologists." And at still other times, it refers to a subculture--"low-income people," or "the new learner." Perhaps it is best defined as "the reality principle." For the College does recognize that by awarding a degree, a symbol which implies recognition by someone other than the student of a "level" of attainment, we have an obligation to help the student obtain an outside perspective against which to measure his or her accomplishment. For that, the review committee is completely appropriate.

This May Work in Vermont, but How Practical Is It Elsewhere, Really?

We cannot answer that question. But perhaps we can offer some of our experience. Although we do pay our Chairperson, we have yet to pay members for their service. Thus far, we have found that the challenge to take some responsibility for a community education effort and the rewards from the experience are ample compensation for most people. At the same time, as we become clearer and more exacting about the process, some questions have begun to arise. How much time can we expect a community member to devote to training? How stringent can the College become in its expectations without turning away people who might otherwise be willing contributors? We don't know the answer to that yet. It is the subject of considerable discussion right now. Some staff maintain that by emphasizing the training and orientation aspect too heavily we will negate the value of spontaneous community participation. Others maintain that intensive training and permanent committees are essential in order to retain the integrity of the degree. It is our hope that we can do both. We hope that by clarifying the process and by developing clear, explicit orientation materials, we will be able to drive away some of the mystical fog, yet at the same time, make the process still simpler for community people to grasp, more enticing for their participation. For in the end, they *are* the College. That much, we do know.

EPILOGUE

What have we learned from all this? Here are some things:

- Communities and individual learners have within themselves the resources to take an active part in their own education--in the establishment of standards as well as the assessment of learning.
- When standards are founded on student goals, a community-based assessment process can be uniquely individualized, appropriate to community expectations, and educationally sound.
- When learning is clearly distinguished from experience, student self-assessment of experiential learning can be an effective way to learn how to learn and a powerful source of enhanced self-esteem.
- When students are actively engaged in developing their own statements of competence, a competence-based approach is compatible with learner-centered educational values.
- When the assessment of prior learning forms the basis for future planning, a well-integrated and individualized degree program can result.

Yet, valuable as these lessons have been for us, perhaps the most important thing we have learned is that "How much is enough?" is a very bad question. For it implies that evaluation of learning is somehow, ultimately, a matter of quantity: "how *much*." It is not.

Rather, we should ask: What kind of learning is *appropriate*? Now we can get to the heart of the matter: the *quality*, the *nature*, the *relevance* of learning to what the learner wants. It is the degree that has led us astray--and society's fantasy of what it means. CCV does not deny the importance of that bit of paper to learners who need better jobs. We grant a degree. But, we hope we have not confused the label with the wine. We hope that somewhere down the road someone will begin to ask: Why a degree, anyway? And we hope that by emphasizing self-assessment, student-written descriptions of competence, and a community-based evaluation process, we will remain centered on the educational questions: What have I learned? What do I want to learn? How can I learn it? and, How can I prove and show it to the world? As students get better at asking and answering those questions, they are learning how to learn, they begin to accept more responsibility for their lives, they grow more self-reliant. That, we think, is what education ought to do.

APPENDIX

The narratives you are about to read are descriptions of CCV's "criteria" for the degree--ten areas of competence which students are asked to address in developing their contracts. We have kept them deliberately broad so that students can use them as lenses through which to view their own specific fields of study.

Self-Awareness
Communication
Cultural Awareness
Community Relations
Interpersonal Relationships
Creative Competence
Manual and Physical Competence
Relationship with the Environment
Analytical Competence
Knowledge

SELF-AWARENESS

The capacity to be aware of oneself *while being*, rather than just being, is the essence of humanness. Out of that awareness comes the ability to decide freely.

To become increasingly self-reliant, it is important to be aware of the forces that help or hinder the accomplishment of your goals. Many of those forces lie outside of us, but those within us are often the ones that we can do more about. By sharpening our awareness of our inner selves, we are more able to deal effectively in the outside world.

Wise men through the ages have extolled us to "know ourselves first." They have shown us that knowledge is distorted by the eyes of the knower. Hence, as we come to see ourselves more clearly, we will enrich our understanding of the surrounding world. It has also been hinted, however, that self-awareness is perhaps the most difficult quality for people to achieve. Not only does it require honesty of a kind often difficult to come by, but it is complicated by the fact that living and learning are nonstop processes, and the very act of gaining awareness and insight into ourselves causes us to change and get ahead of ourselves again. Any amount is helpful however, and the adage, "Knowledge is power" probably applies to the self as much as to anything, for the better we are able to predict how we are apt to feel and behave in a situation, the more choice we have about what we'll do with those feelings and reactions when the time comes. The more conscious we are of our preferences, our strengths, and our limitations, the better decisions we can make for ourselves and the more power we have over our lives.

Self-awareness is important in our working life as well as personal life. For if you wish to improve your skills, it is useful to be realistic about those you already have. Some of the ways in which you might address this area through your work might be to think through your work skills--which ones you feel good at, which you would like to improve. You might also consider how your strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes affect your job performance. It might also be helpful to get a sense of how the expectations of what you "should" be like relate to how you see yourself. Teachers, for example, are often supposed to be organized, strict, clever, and moral; typists "should" be pleasant, mindless, obedient, and feminine; mechanics are seen as aggressive, practical, tough, and masculine. How are you expected to be? How do you see yourself? How do you want to be? This is a good chance to put down for your own examination some of your attitudes, skills, feelings, style.

As you address this area, remember that CCV is not requiring intense introspection. At the same time, however, the College does believe that self-reliance begins with self-awareness, for only by realistically assessing where you are can you determine where you want to go.

COMMUNICATION

Almost whatever we do, whether we intend to or not, we are communicating. The importance of competence in this area for the self-reliant learner cannot be overemphasized. For by becoming more fully aware of how we communicate, we can better affect how we see and are seen by others.

When you begin to examine your own part in the swirl of communication that surrounds us all, it may be useful to consider some of the ways that communication does and does not occur.

Communication is, first of all, a two-way process. It involves both sending messages and receiving them. Some people can present their ideas beautifully but are deaf to the responses to them. That's not effective communication. Others may listen and understand well but leave people wondering what their ideas on the subject are. That's not effective communication, either. You will need to demonstrate that you are a good receiver as well as sender.

Both sending and receiving may occur with or without words. Nonverbal communication is often as important as verbal. The messages sent or received by gestures, clothing, and personal style are important to consider.

And finally, verbal communication may be either oral or written. Skill in both of these areas is fundamental for almost any job or life situation. Considering your personal goal, how well must you write or speak? And, on the receiving side, how well are you able to read or listen? Too often these skills are ignored, yet they are very much a part of competent communication.

Remember, ideas can't breathe and grow in a vacuum. They need exposure, understanding, testing, company. The better you are at communicating effectively, the firmer and richer your ideas will grow. And the richer your thinking, the more self-reliant you will become.

CULTURAL AWARENESS

Who are you? A mother? A businessman? A Vermonter? An Elk? A Christian? A Republican? A Worker? A Feminist? In the midst of a swirl of conflicting values, identities, questions, and answers, who can blame us for finding that question sometimes difficult to answer?

Yet, looking closer, most of us find that we identify more closely with one group than another. For we cannot escape completely our time and culture; we shape and are shaped by them. The purpose of this area of competence is to help you explore more fully the meaning of being a human being in the latter part of the 20th century.

We often hear it said that education can "broaden our horizons," that an educated person has a "broad perspective." To have a sense of what it means to be a human, of the common characteristics uniting us all, is to have a basis for just such a "broad perspective." One of the greatest values of education is that it can give us experience beyond our immediate world. While reading a book or seeing a film about a tribe in New Guinea may not be the same as being there, in many ways we can learn from such an experience, insights about being human that can be gained in no other way. The ability to see and sense a reality beyond our own time and place, without losing our own sense of who we are, is an elemental characteristic of becoming a more self-reliant person. For the better we come to know others, the better we come to know ourselves.

To indicate your competence in this area you will need to demonstrate that you have developed your perspective about what it means to be human so that rather than make unthinking generalizations about what is right and wrong, you can stand back and discuss *why* people act as they do. You might do this by studying anthropology, politics, sociology, history, or psychology. You might contrast your own behavior and values with those of people in another time or culture. You might relate this to your work by examining how your job or lifestyle is affected by the prevailing mid-20th century values. No doubt, you will find for yourself a variety of ways to answer the fundamental question: "What does it mean to be human?"

Throughout your investigation, however, it is essential to show that you can look at your place in the world in an objective and critical manner so that when you watch the news or read the paper you are able to form reasoned opinions about what is happening. For anyone can join causes, demonstrate, or salute the flag. It takes both perspective and conviction to understand and explain why.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

CCV is a "Community College" in more than name alone. We believe that just as education is the community's concern, the community is also education's concern. A self-reliant learner should be able to demonstrate both knowledge of his or her community and skill in working within that community.

Community means any group of people with whom you work or live who have a common bond uniting them. This might be those in your workplace, your neighbors at home, or perhaps even people of a different culture.

When you have decided on what you mean by *your community*, it will be necessary to demonstrate that you know and understand the people in it and what makes it work. If you are a newcomer, this can be an exciting project, a conscious inquiry about your new home. If you have been there for a while, this can be a chance to see how aware you have been and to sharpen your knowledge. One area to consider might be the culture of your surroundings. What are the major values and beliefs of your neighbors? Another could be the resources of the community. In your professional or personal life, where do you turn for help? Who are the people, what are the agencies or institutions that can provide answers for the different sort of questions you may have? Still another could be an investigation of the political or economic forces at work. Who are the leaders? What groups are influential? How do things "really" work?

CCV also believes that education should result in action. You will need to demonstrate that you can put your knowledge to work in making an impact on your community in some way. A wide range of possibilities emerges here, from participation in church or civic activities to running a small economic enterprise. The important thing is not the activity itself, however, but what you learned from it. You should indicate why you did what you did, and what you would do differently another time.

No doubt, in exploring this area, you will find a wide range of applicable skills of your own. Remember, whatever you do, that competence in community relations means knowing your community, being able to act productively in it, and understanding what you have done.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Competence in interpersonal relationships means the ability to work effectively with other people. Although "self-reliance" implies that you can get along on your own, it does not mean that you only work that way. We are all social beings and the ability to relate well to others is an essential part of being a person. At the same time, CCV does not expect that everyone will be universally loved and admired. We all have our problems, but working effectively with others means that you can cooperate with people to attain your goals.

In looking at your competence in this area, it is important first to consider why you need to work well with people. To gain more customers? To be a better teacher? To change people's attitudes? Or simply to be liked? The clearer your goal, the easier it will be to determine what skills and knowledge you will need to assess or develop. Your work in the area of "self-awareness" will help here.

You might then consider the people with whom you relate. Large or small groups? Individuals? People in need? Angry people? And then think about how you relate. Do you give speeches, write memos, listen carefully, converse casually, issue orders, teach, conduct interviews? People do all of these things at different times in different settings. Consider carefully why, with whom, and how you relate to people.

You may find it helpful to think about the variety of different parts people play. Some roles are rather directive: managing, leading, or supervising. Others require a different sort of competence: entertaining, persuading, or instructing. Still others are more neutral,

such as consulting, counseling, helping, or negotiating. And finally, some roles simply involve providing a service to people. Each of these involves a different and unique cluster of interpersonal skills.

It is also important to demonstrate that you are *aware* of how you use your skills. If you are in a "helping profession," for instance, what general principles do you apply in working with people to "help" them? If you are a store manager and need to maintain good customer relations, how do you do it? The point here is that in addition to applying your skills, you must demonstrate that you have thought enough about how you use them to explain your principles to others.

The self-reliant learner can work effectively with other people. Your task is to determine how you do it, how well, and to show others that you have developed a set of principles on which you base your actions.

CREATIVE COMPETENCE

CCV believes that to become more creative is to become more fully human. The ability to act creatively is of fundamental importance to the goal of becoming more self-reliant, for the self-reliant learner owns his or her life, and takes responsibility for it. One's life, in a very real sense, is one's own creation.

Every time we speak, we are combining words in new ways to create sentences never before spoken, meanings never before thought. We are all unique people and have within ourselves the capacity to become more creative, to think new thoughts, to do original things. In a real sense, to be creative is to do something new, never done before.

Much research has gone into the effort to discover what makes people creative. It seems that creative people tend to be less afraid of being different, more able to suspend judgment, more open-minded to "crazy" or new ideas, more able to express their feelings, less authoritarian, more independent, and more curious about almost everything. Probably none of us can lay claim to all these characteristics, but all of us have some of them. We can learn to act more creatively by recognizing those strengths and encouraging them in our own lives.

But creativity is more than just a way of being. It is a way of doing things. The creative act is completed only when something has been created. Such a "thing" might be an object (such as a painting or short story), sounds (such as a piece of music), an idea (a new way of solving a problem), or perhaps even a way of behaving with people that frees them and makes them more creative (in the way that a skilled teacher or group leader can be creative).

Much blood has been shed over whether the products of various forms of creativity are "good" or not. That is largely a matter of taste. But what is common to any genuinely creative product is that it combines elements in a new and unique way, be they ideas, sounds, colors, or foods. Just as "analysis" means taking things apart, creativity means putting together. Your efforts to address this goal could be as simple as designing a new and more effective filing system in your office or as complex as writing a rock concerto for guitar and jug band. The important thing to bear in mind is that your effort should be original and it should be you.

MANUAL AND PHYSICAL COMPETENCE

CCV believes that the self-reliant learner is equally at home in the physical as in the intellectual world. We believe that the ability to work with our hands skillfully and to understand the rest of our physical being is fundamental to full development. For that reason, the College places full and equal recognition on this important area.

You can demonstrate and improve your competence in this area in lots of ways. For example, the focus of your degree might be in auto mechanics or pottery. If so, you would attribute major significance to this area and refine your manual skills for vocational purposes. Or you might consider hobbies in which you use your hands--carpentry, weaving, or crafts. Homemakers, drivers, farmers, and office workers, in fact most people, perform numerous activities daily which require manual skills. Think about these skills, what they mean to you, and how you would like to improve them.

Knowing how our bodies work, increasing our awareness of changes in our bodies, developing greater sensitivity to physical sensations, and learning how to care for our bodies are all areas for exploration by those of us who have lost touch with this elemental part of our being. Increasing your knowledge of the nutritional value of foods or partaking in a variety of outdoor physical activities are ways in which to increase your body awareness.

Sports, exercises, cycling, and hiking are activities that help to bring us more into tune with our physical being. There is a real value in being in good physical condition. If you feel well, you are apt to remain alert and to think more clearly than if you are in poor condition. "I'm too old for that" is generally an excuse to let ourselves die a little. In addressing this area of competence you can resist that urge. Take this opportunity not simply to think about activities in which you once took part, or skills which you already have, but use this as a chance to explore some new possibilities, develop new skills, open yourself up and grow.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

In addition to ideas and people, we are surrounded by a "real world" of objects--natural and man-made. Trees blow in the breeze, rocks fall, wood floats, fire burns. It seems an almost inborn trait to be curious about why these things happen. Designers plan buildings, clothing, and automobiles; and managers arrange office space, industrial equipment, and products. Human beings have not been content in their curiosity about the natural environment, they have shaped and reshaped the environment to meet their need for comfort and their sense of beauty.

CCV believes that a self-reliant learner ought to display a healthy curiosity about the environment and an awareness of his or her role in shaping and responding to it, for we are a part of nature, not separate from it. We constantly change our environment or react to it. It is imperative that we come to terms with it instead of striving to overcome an "enemy" which is, in reality, only ourselves.

You might demonstrate your awareness in a wide variety of ways. You might, for instance, show that you have an understanding of how our modern civilization affects the environment--how

pollution or resource depletion disrupts the ecology of natural systems. Or perhaps you could show that you can carry out a scientific investigation of soil types in your region. Another approach might be to indicate an understanding of animal behavior or of the classification of types of plants. You might instead decide to investigate how people shape their environment in an office or classroom to increase the productivity of workers or students.

To demonstrate your competence in this area, you are asked to indicate that you have thought in depth about how you relate with the physical world, that you have exercised a genuine curiosity in asking questions about how things work, and that you have begun to evolve some answers to your questions.

ANALYTICAL COMPETENCE

Analytical competence means the ability to think and act in a reasoning, systematic manner. The ability to "think things through carefully" is of crucial importance to becoming more self-reliant. For unless we can think critically, act reasonably, and plan rationally, we remain at the mercy of the sort of emotional and arbitrary appeals that keep us from being able to take deliberate responsibility for our lives.

In a narrow sense, to analyze something means to take it apart, to identify the parts, to look at each carefully, and to understand the relationships among those parts. In a broader sense, it involves being able to solve problems and make decisions based on a full understanding of the situation.

One of the more common ways to address this area is to demonstrate that you can define, analyze, and solve problems effectively. This often involves applying some variant of the "scientific method" in which you gather information, define the problem, identify probable causes and possible solutions, try out a solution, and evaluate the results. Although problem-solving is probably the most useful analytical skill to develop, it is not the only way in which to develop competence in this area. Other thinking skills such as the ability to conduct an inquiry, do research, organize information for decision making, take apart and construct an argument, and conduct a systematic sequence of evaluation are also important skills. Often, students find that some combination of these is most practical.

In addition to actually doing these things, it is important to be aware of *how* you do them. In problem solving, for instance, it is important not only that you can solve problems, but also that you develop a *system*, a way of solving a number of different problems. A good way to begin doing this is to take a problem which you know you have solved and try to explain how you did it to someone else so they could follow your rules to solve their own problems.

The important point to remember is that you must show that you think things through, act on the basis of your decision, and have a systematic way of doing it.

KNOWLEDGE

Behind CCV's educational approach is the belief that *how* we think is more fundamental than *what* we think. For this reason, most of the areas of competence emphasize your skills and your knowledge of how you put those skills to work--how you think, how you work with others, and how

you relate to the physical world. The College recognizes, however, that the actual knowledge you acquire is also of importance. For without it there can be no thought, no action.

Knowledge forever builds on itself, supporting or contracting or enlarging or toppling over previous knowledge; always restructuring our picture of reality. It is important, then, to remember that though the arrangement and significance of the pieces may change, even the old and discarded information and ideas are part of the whole picture. (If you find Dr. Freud's work out-of-date and feel it will never be of use to you, the fact that you know it and have thought it through is still important. Even if you now operate only complex machinery, the knowledge of how to do the job with simple tools is still real knowledge.)

Probably the most useful thing about working through this area is that it gives you a chance to identify in general terms what you know--so that you "know what you know." When you are able to do this it becomes easier to see what you don't know, what you still want to learn. On the basis of this, you can get down to planning where to go next.

The object of this area of competence is to help you bring together your accumulated knowledge in a way that can be presented for other peoples' understanding. You might choose to do this in a variety of ways, arranging it according to your primary field of study, according to major themes, or in any other way that helps you share with others your knowledge as a whole, integrated achievement. It is the hope of the College that its graduates will never be at a loss to explain their program of study, what it includes, and why.

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